CPL

7

CRAIG RUSSELL

QUESTION
CRIME
SPECIAL REPORT BY
JOHN L. BYRNE
DOTY VOWLAND

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Special Thanks Dept: Special thanks goes out to Steve Sundahl for the use of his barbarian illo by Craig Russell on page 16. (Can I have my first-born male child back now?) Also, thanks goes out to C.P.L's best friend, Don (Oh, my aching nose) Newton, for his last minute illo of his new Charlton character, Baron Wierwulf. This issue is dedicated to Val Mayerik and his brand-new wife, Janet.

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Artists this issue: Dan Adkins, John Byrne, Paul Gulacy, Bob Layton, Val Mayerik, Don Newton, Craig Russell, and Duffy Vohland.

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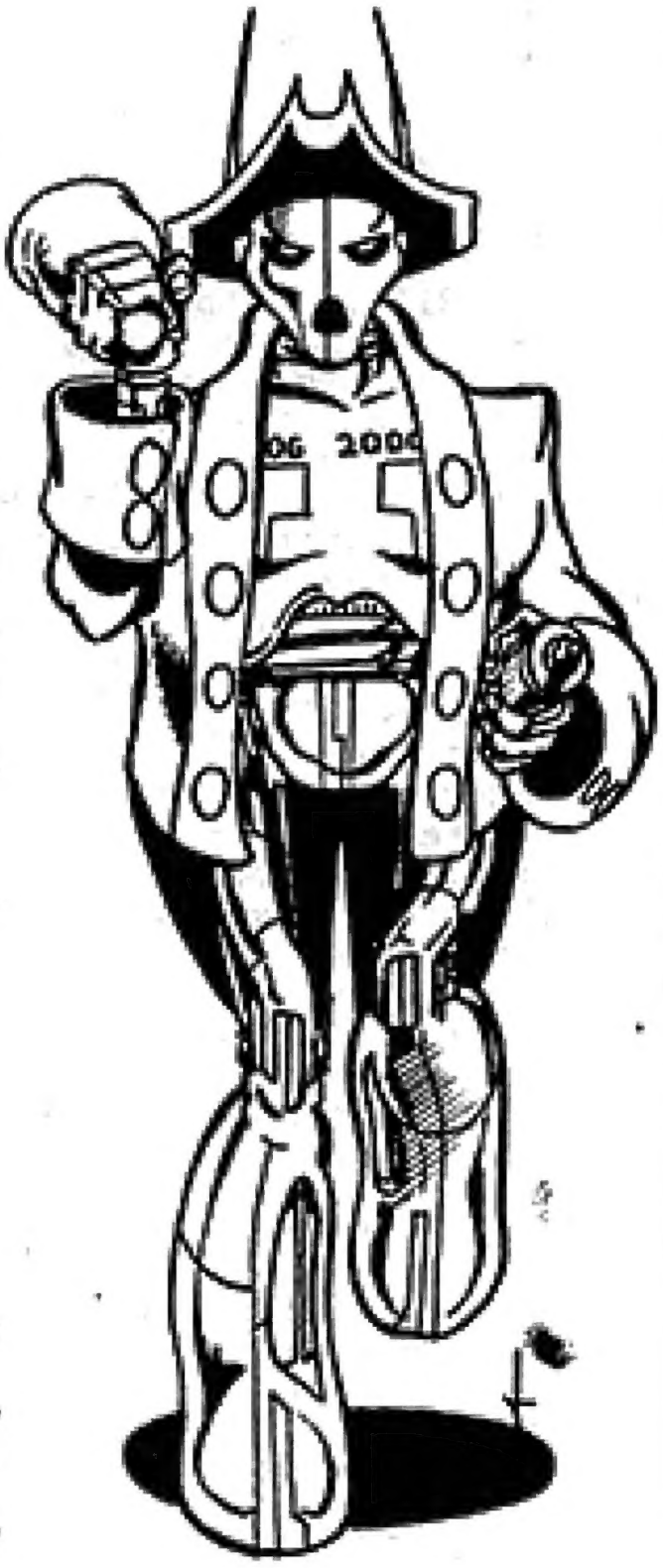
Our apologies to 'Doc' Larry Brnicky, who's article was crowded out this issue. ONE LAST DESPERATE CHANCE" will be around next issue,(for the next hundred issues as well) so hang in there!

Next issue will be full of surprises! We are now negotiating with several BIG name artists for C.P.L #8 and we'll do our best to bring 'em to you. Also, all the regular columns, part II of Tony's The Hour of Thunder and the first installment of Fortier's Fandom! Rogie-2000 says:"Be there, ya dumb human!"



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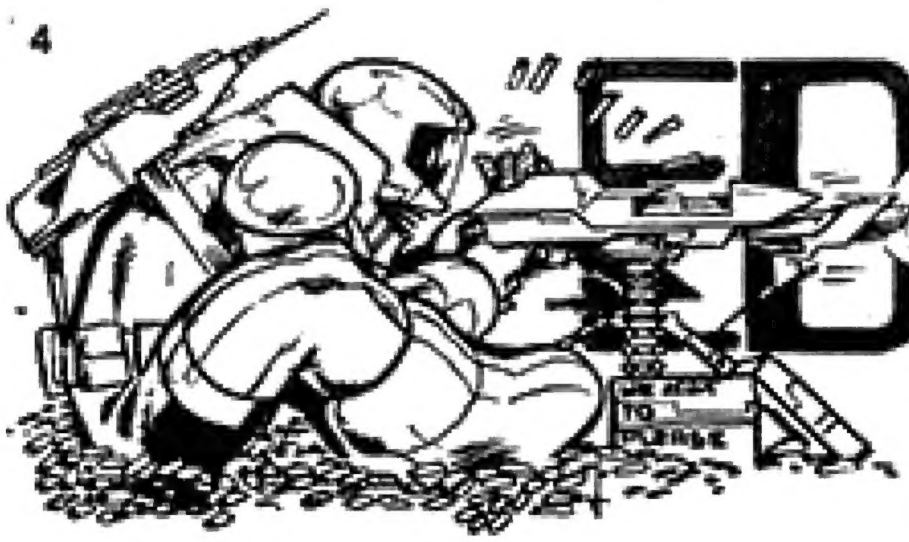

EDITORIAL

by Bob & Sterno

Putting out a fanzine can really put you through some changes. Take the CPL crew, for instance. In the past six months editor-in-chief Bob has gone from being a comics dealer to being a daring young fanzine editor...and at last report, he had thrown all caution (not to mention a stack of yellowing zip-a-tone and one half-eaten jelly sandwich) to the winds in an attempt to become a big name artist with the Dan Adkins gang.

Slifer, in the meantime, has gone east to study Brooklynese at the feet of Grand-Gang-Guru Duffy Vohland. All of which means that I'm stuck with pounding out this issue's editorial, while trying to ignore the mechanical kibutzing of my metallic co-editor, Rogie-2000. (Wait 'til he finds out he has to proofread the final lay-outs! Chortle!)

So what's the point of talking about the changes our humble staff endures? Glad you asked! The simple fact is that CPL is gonna change also. Now don't get all upset!! CPL has always been undergoing change. Afterall, originally it was nothing more than a comics catalog. There will be nothing really drastic in the new changes. Basically we'll be cutting back to a quarterly schedule. This'll give our faithful staff a chance to meet deadlines while still leading what are suppose to be normal lives. Secondly, we are bringing to a close our first and probably last subscription drive. No More Subs! It goes without saying that all previous subs will be honored. That means we'll have to keep publishing until, at least, issue #12! Sheesh! Anyway, you can count on CPL changing...hopefully for the better. We won't be going slick, or typeset, or four-color... but Bob and the paper shortage willing, we will improve! How? Stay with us and find out!

And now, let's take a look at issue number seven.

As mentioned last issue, we are presenting a rolicing interview with Craig Russell and a beautiful portfolio of visuals by the talented Mel Mayerik. And although those two features, along with the stunning visuals by Paul Gulacy and Dan Adkins, threaten to make this the special "Ohio" issue, there's still room for the usual columns by Messrs. Brnicky, Vohland, Slifer as well as yours truly! Plus, this issue, the remarkable return to fanzines of the Wandering Fan himself, Tony Isabella! Also, more art by Don Newton, Bashful Bob and everybody's favorite Canadian, John L. Byrne.

And next issue...the second installment of "The Secret Life of Peter Parker", in which my old school chum, Franklin W. Maynerd takes an in-depth look at our friendly neighborhood arachnid's religious leanings. Plus all the usual features.. and more fun and thrills than you can shake a stick at!

So until next issue, here's wishing you good reading and as fearless Bob says...

Heavy Hemongers,
Sterno and Rog-2000

Dear CPL Readership,

I have returned from the depths of East Liverpool, Ohio where I made my first attempt to go pro. At the time you read this, I will still not know the fate of my sample pages that were sent to Marvel. Never fear, I shall keep you all informed as news breaks. But I didn't interupt Sterno's editorial for a moment of chest beating...

It has come to the attention of the CPL staff that certain parties in fandom has seen fit to ignore the copyright laws protecting our publication. I would like to let it be known that CPL is protected by a legal copyright and we are totally within our rights to prosecute any violaters. (C.P.L.#5 Copyright registration #26122, C.P.L.#6 Copyright registration #26121)

We feel it is the duty of CPL readers to inform us when they suspect a violation of our copyright and to withdraw their support from any publication doing such. It is by your support that CPL is able to bring you fandom's best.----------Bob

-GULACY-

THE FIVE MOST ORIGINAL COMIC SERIES OF 1973

Each year the crazy and lovable world of comics is subjected to the collective scrutiny of its adherents and hangers-on so that the "best" of the past year can be determined--the "best" writer, the "best" artist, "best" story, "best" series, etc. etc: in fact, this is done twice.... once by the pros in the guise of the annual Shazam awards and once by fandom-at-large through the Comic Art Fan Awards.

"Best."

The word has a horrendously subjective taste to it, doesn't it?

How about if we look back at the comics of 1973 from another perspective--say, instead of judging the "best" of the year, by discussing the most "imaginative" comics of the year. Or perhaps the year's most "innovative" books. Or better yet, let's lump "imaginative" and "innovative" into a single heading: "originality". To be sure, judging the "originality" of the various funny books is a subjective process as well, but at least it's not as vague and sloppy as determining the best.

However, there are some definitions and ground rules.

1. Herein we'll be discussing comic series, or, if you will, comic titles. In other words, we'll look at a magazine in its entirety (at least as far as 1973 is concerned) and not at single issues.

2. The idea of "originality" means the relevant merits of plotting and scripting, artwork, and--importantly, the series' underlying concepts. From this perspective, such books as Conan, The Shadow, Tarzan, and others adapted from earlier non-comics work is automatically excluded since they are not totally original. Reprint titles, of course, are out. On the other hand, long-running series such as Superman, Batman, Spider-Man and Fantastic Four are in the running because their own basic story lines are original to the world of comics. The thing is, though, their very longevity works against them because after such long runs there is precious little untrodden ground remaining to be exploited within their own legends.

Understand? Probably not, but, with this in mind, MacDuff, we shall now embark on a review of The Five Most Original Comic Series of 1973.

The most original comic series of 1973 appeared in the pages of Marvel Premiere and featured the adventures of one Dr. Strange.

Last year's adventures into high sorcery differed markedly from the good doctor's earlier exploits in Strange Tales, and the series enjoyed the added distinction of being the only one on the market today featuring a modern-day sorcerer. With Dr. Strange, magic is the book's gestalt. And despite the fact that various R.E. Howard concepts were evident in the year's first three issues of MP (#8-10), their treatment by Gardner Fox and Steve Englehart quite neatly masked this fact. Their use wasn't extensive enough to banish the doings of Strange from the realm of originality.

Perhaps the most enjoyable and thought-provoking aspect of the series, not only in 1973 but beginning with its revival in 1972 at the hands of Archie Goodwin and Barry Smith, was its treatment of life and life's essence--and its musings on the nature of the after-life, as was the case with the now-departed Ancient One. In MP #12 I found Strange's reflections on life, death and his own Weltanschauung (you guess what I said...), quite striking:

"Life---" he said, "The opposite of life is not death, but non-existence. To die means having lived-but to not exist means nothing. To live means to influence the cosmos. One's actions--one's presence--changes every being he meets.

"The cosmos is everything. To affect any part of the cosmos is to affect the totality. Life is the most precious gift the cosmos can bestow...and it is the lot of Dr.

Strange to preserve the gift.

"This lizard means everything to me, just as all living things do. This lizard is sacred in its existence. For a few seconds, I held the life of a sacred being in my hands."

"What an awesome responsibility."

While Fox's script in #8 was turgid and long-winded, Englehart's efforts in the succeeding issues flowed smoothly and,at times,eloquently. This was one of the series' greatest strengths. Another was its intricate and compelling plotline--first, the battle against Shuma-Gorath,the cosmic obscenity who planned to defeat Strange and institutionalize a wor--ship of evil on Earth and throughout the universe, and later, in issues 12-14,Strange's struggle against the would-be God, Sise-neg.

The latest three issues highlighted a less stilted,more human Strange than the one portrayed earlier. His very humanity was emphasized as his noble speeches and behavior crumbled at times when he pleaded with Sise-neg for mercy in behalf of others as the two, along with the evil Baron Mordo, traveled backward through time.

As for the art,Jim Starlin's work in issue #8 was below par, but Frank Brunner's takeover the next issue brought a new life to the feature. His work improved noticeably with each passing issue thanks to the help of the Crusty You-know-whos.

Close behind Dr. Strange in the originality race is DC's Swamp Thing. Like a number of other series, it features consistently superior artwork and fine writing: what sets it apart is its inherent difference from those series.

Swamp Thing is not a super-hero book and it's not really a mystery/ horror book, yet it manages to combine the best elements of both. And aside from the similarity in their names, the Swamp Thing is quite far

removed from Marvel's Man-Thing,both in terms of quality and concept.

In fact, when you think about it, their names should be exchanged--the Swamp Thing, with Dr. Alec Holland alive within him and the fact that he's rarely featured in swampy settings, is more of a "man-thing", while there's little to make one think there's anything man-like about Marvel's monster of the Everglades.

But no matter. The important thing is that DC"s feature is a much more compelling one than Marvel's. Instead of being a mindless, Hulkish beast,the Swamp Thing is quite alive and intelligent...but condemned to search endlessly for the key to his physical humanity. The pathos of the series stems from the inescapable fact that no one will ever understand him, although many will sympathize with him.

In issue #4, the first of 1973, the Swamp Thing tangled with a werewolf and went on two months later to be befriended by a young warlock and his familiar. Both stories drew heavily on gothic and mystical elements for their plots. The sixth issue found him in a village of child like robots and signalled a shift in emphasis away from the gothic as the Conclave sub-plot began to draw to a close. The following issue, this year's high point, found the Swamp Thing pitted against an uncomprehending--and uncompromising--Batman as they crossed paths in their battles against the criminal organization. The next two issues weren't quite as good as the previous ones;both seemed padded as neither scripter Len Wein nor artist Berni Wrightson were able to get to the point of the stories with any amount of dispatch.

One of the nicest things about this series is that Wein has been able to convey its basic theme--the contrast between the Swamp Thing's essential humanity and the inhumanity of the surrounding world-without having to smash it into the reader's head. Each issue is a vignette,complete in itself despite the running sub-plots. This is good for a theme and feature such as this; anyway, a mossy eight-foot monster definitely isn't the soap-opera type.

How Swamp Thing will fare in the future remains to be seen. With Nestor Redondo reportedly slated to take over from Wrightson,it may lose some of its fluid vitality. But right now one thing is certain-both of the big comic companies can learn a lot about the dynamics of effective story-telling from this book.

Third on the list is the Jonah Hex feature in DC's Weird Western Tales.

Hex is such an ugly and callous son of a bitch that it's not hard to understand why the feature has received some vehement criticism in WWT's letters column.

The very fact that Hex is so unfeeling, makes him unique in the realm of western comic heroes...and aside from the very early Sub-Mariner, he's pretty well unique among all comic heroes.

Hex is an anti-hero, the type of person a super-hero could never be and yet be acceptable on the stands today. Maybe this is a reflection on the pseudo-elitist view we in 1974 have of ourselves--it's all right for a former-Confederate-turned-bounty hunter to be a truly hard and mean cuss...but, say, contemporary heroes such as Daredevil or Green Arrow? Uh, uh. No way!

Writer John Albino's characterization of Hex has been clear and effective without distracting the reader from the story itself. For example, in WWT #21 we find Hex bringing to town three outlaws he'd rounded up. They run into a snowstorm along the way. Soon, one of the outlaws calls out to him.

Hex: "Well, what is it?"

Outlaw: "Jasper! H-he's stopped coughing...I think he's....chucked it!"

Hex: "Is that all? Look, boy, don't go callin' me agin' unless it's important, y'hear?"

Jasper, for the record, had been winged in the shoulder by Hex while he was capturing the trio. A few seconds later Hex had nonchalantly kicked him full in the face.

Albino's Hex is his own man, unconcerned about justice unless he's directly involved in the conflict at hand. Ostensibly he's a bounty hunter, looking for the rewards he'll receive for hauling in the bad guys dead or alive, Hex ain't partic'lar. Yet there are traces of an inner softness and concern for others. Hex is by no means an ascetic and has been known to take a few days off to find hisself a senorita across the border.

Without delving extensively into Hex's mind, Albino has managed to infuse him with a distinct and unmistakable personality. The nice thing about Albino's technique is that it's subtle;instead of gathering the details from a protagonist's mouth, as is so often the case with other series, the reader learns more about Hex's characterization with each of his actions.

Artist Tony DeZuniga, I daresay, is the best western artist ever to grace the pages of comics. While my experience with western comics is sketchy at best, I can at least say that, judging from DC's and Marvel's western reprints, no artist has been more adept at capturing the essential roughness and emotion of the old west than DeZuniga.

Mike Fleisher took over the scripting job with WWT #22, but based on Albino's stories and a fill-in by Arnold Drake,the series is well worth reading regularly.

Brace yourself for number 4. Are you ready?

PREZ.

I'm not joking, people. This product of Joe Simon's imagination is so strange and offbeat that it has no parallel...except, of course, for the two issues of Simon's earlier Brother Power, The Geek, which is Prez's direct-line ancestor. If The Geek had remained on the stands, Brother Power surely would have made it to the White House before too long.

Prez is satire, of course--satire which at times is so heavy-handed

and blatant that many write it off unthinkingly. Yet despite its heavy handedness it's light-hearted. Political satire reigns in its pages and each story attacks a different target within this overall starting point. Significantly, though, it's done without a trace of the self-righteousness that characterized some of Denny O'Neil's work on the old Green Lantern/Green Arrow series or that permeated much of Mike Friedrich's writing for Julie Schwartz during the past few years.

Much of Prez's satire is done just for the sake of fun, as with issue #2's parody of Bobby Fisher. Two issues later the target seems to have been Marvel's Werewolf by Night and Tomb of Dracula books: the werewolf was Wolfman, the ambassador from Transylvania, while Dracula was a legless cripple, scooting around on a little cart with the aid of handblocks. At the same time, though, Simon manages to get in a few backhanded slaps at certain targets-Mayor Daley in #1, the myth of peace in our violent world in the first few pages of #2, and the right-wing Minutemen organization in #3.

The book has none of the oh-so-earnest seriousness that characterizes many comics, particularly the Marvels, and this may put some fans off. So be it. But this won't alter the fact that Prez is certainly imaginative and innovative, and ably presented within the context of its chosen "imaginary world."

Last of the five is Marvel's Captain Marvel,which is probably the "best" superhero comic sold today. It makes the list despite the nature of its plotline, which has drawn heavily from the Kirby Trilogy: the good guys fighting the baddie (Thanos/Darkseid),who is seeking the key to Ultimate Power (the Cosmic Cube/ the Anti-Life Equation), and despite the similarities between the symbiosis of Rick Jones/Mar-vell and Billy Batson/Captain Marvel.

CM makes the list because Jim Starlin is a master story-teller. While his art isn't power-packed like Kirby's,it exudes its own special brand of Majesty,one which draws the reader into it rather than leaps out at him.

Since Starlin plots the series himself and of late has been writing it as well, he's been able to add imaginative touches and twists that would normally be impossible. He tends to center the story around its artistic possibilities, instead of the other way around. His journeys into Mar-vell's mind are, shall we say, mind-boggling, enhanced as they are by his intricate and well-defined illustrations. (I'd hate to see a DC artist try the same thing working from another writer's script.) The end result is a beautiful, readable product,unsurpassed in its chosen realm.

Finally, an Honorable Mention for a single story: the Steve Englehart/ Sal Amendola Batman saga, "Night of the Stalker," in Detective Comics #439. Here was THE DEFINITIVE Batman,outwardly shed of his humanity.. truly a "creature of the night." I bring this story up because it could well have been Batman's very first story back in the late Thirties--it captured perfectly comics only really unique crime-fighter and shows how utterly terrifying he can be. Englehart's Batman, unlike those of the other writers, would not be featured in an Earth-One celebrities/ expose magazine. It's a shame that other Batman writers and artists haven't been able to see the Masked Manhunter for what he should be.

CRAIG RUSSELL

(c) 1974 by Tony Anello

Before starting this interview I would like to state that this took place on the 11th floor of the Detroit Hilton in Craig's room. Posing the questions for CPL were Kim Eastland, Butch McAmis, and myself.

Craig Russell, for the record is a shy, reserved individual with some pretty strong ideas about comics and fandom,as you will soon find out. For you nit-pickers who have to know Craig is twenty-one years old and is currently living in Brooklyn with Gang leader, Duffy Vohland. ....Bob

CPL: First off Craig, what comics do you have credited to your name at the moment?

CRAIG: Three episodes of Ant-Man, a Dr. Strange, a Iron Man, and several short stories.

CPL: I know you've done some work on Conan too. Issue #21, correct me if I'm wrong. Did you do inking on that issue?

CRAIG: I only did inking on one or two panels. I did all the backgrounds in that issue though, Smith did the lay-outs in blue pencil and Val Mayerik filled in all the people.

CPL: Conan looked a lot like Thongor in that issue.

CRAIG: Thats the way Thongor should have looked like. Anyway, Val did the finished drawing and I did all the backgrounds, castles and such.

CPL: Did Smith do only the first two pages?

CRAIG: Yes. He did pencil the first two pages and then blue penciled the rest of the story. That issue was produced very poorly.

Supposedly, the whole reason for it was so Smith could get ahead. He was slow because he put so much work into each issue of Conan that it put him behind schedule. It was still working out until Dan got behind on his inks, so we finished it and sent it to be lettered and all that. Some parts were so bad that Dan had to white out whole sections and re-do them. At the time, neither Val or I were inkers and the styles were simply incompatible. Dan inked part of it and sent about seven pages to Sal Buscema.

The sad thing is that it was so late that it had to be colored overnight. The coloration was simply hideous! Night scenes were all red and yellow and Conan usually has exceptional coloring.

That Conan was done before my first full length comic. Then I was given my first Ant-Man story. It was arranged at Marvel that Dan would do lay-outs but as it worked out, I drew it and Dan did the corrections.

And he did correct an awfully lot of mistakes, though. We also got in a mess of arguements,too! (laughter) After that, they gave me the Dr. Strange to do and I really knocked myself out on it, but it was over-detailed.

I hadn't learned how to put a great amount of detail and still tell the story, yet.

CPL: Barry Smith is good at that.

CRAIG: Yes, Jeff Jones is another. A lot of people are! (laughter) But I say that the inkers took out a lot of my finer lines and just sloshed over it. I'm refering to Ciaccia, Esposito and Hunt.

CPL: Sounds kinda like a law firm!

CRAIG: Man, I don't even know who Hunt is! Some inking in the Dr. Strange was very nice, probably Ciaccia. The rest was just hack, really hack. The one thing that really got me was the coloring. If you're working in the black and white field, you have no problem as far as your work coming out the way you did it. I don't understand why more attention isn't paid to coloring comics. Color can either destroy or improve a comic, it depends entirely upon the artist that works with color.

CPL: From the artist's point of view, how does it feel when you really knock yourself out on a page, turn it in to Marvel, and then they more or less prostitute or make it look really bad by putting a poor inker on it?

CRAIG: Well,its pretty discouraging. It isn't completely discouraging because the great enjoyment comes from the doing, even if it's messed up. Even if everyone sees it as less than what I did it, I know I did it to the best of my ability. The most important thing is what it means to me. If you don't have that attitude about your work, I think you would get so discouraged by comics, you wouldn't last past a few issues.

Before when you mentioned doing something and then seeing it messed up, I did an issue of Iron Man that I really got excited about. Iron Man was about my favorite super-hero and I really thought I could do something with it. The reason I was asked to do that issue of Iron Man was because I had previously done a walk-on by Iron Man in one of my Ant-Man stories. Mike Friedrich liked my version of Iron Man so well, he asked Roy to let me do a fill in issue. So I knocked myself out on this story, doing twenty pages of little light reflections that Mike was crazy over, and when I turned it

in they took all those little reflections out! I couldn't believe it!! I found out later that Esposito took them all out for continuity's sake. They said that Iron Man doesn't always have those little blips of light. They also made some changes as far as story-telling, taking panels out and rearranging them. That didn't bother me because the corrections they made improved the story. But to actually make a comic worse, just for continuity's sake makes no sense at all!

CPL: Getting back to coloring, what do you think of the European comics?

CRAIG: They're just beautiful!

CPL: Of course, they have better quality paper than we have. We don't seem to give much of a damn, do we?

CRAIG: No, we don't. Tom Palmer is about the best colorer I can think of.He really knows how to rend in shadows, which is something that Marvel's colorists can't seem to grasp. When they do a scene at night it's always dark green, dark blue or pale purple, but Palmer can do a scene at night and everything is colorful or there are shades of color. His coloring actually adds to the drama of the story.

CPL: Is your new Dr. Strange the next thing you started work on?

CRAIG: No. After that Iron Man story I did the last Ant-Man and I was really getting depressed about my work.

CPL: Many fans consider your last Ant-Man your best because it had more action in it.

CRAIG: I was slowly improving issue to issue.I was having to force myself into the super-hero, Marvel, approach to doing comics.

CPL: I noticed you had to swipe if that's what your driving at.

CRAIG: Well, I've used lots of swipes from the start. It's a slow process of taking a swipe and making it your own work. Smith swipes.

That was one of my main reasons for taking a leave of absense from Marvel. I needed time to step back and take an objective look at my work. I had gotten into comics without any previous training in the art field and I felt I needed to get away from comics for a while. I spent a couple of months just looking at other comics. I have a big E.C. file, all cut up, that Adkins gave me. I would spend hours going over them line by line to see how other people drew. Then I started working on a Dr. Strange story that I made up and trying to come up with a fresh approach. Something more my own and more fantasy oriented than my previous Dr. Strange. I even got books on Indian temples. I've always felt that they've never done enough with Dr. Strange's hands,so I found this book in a bookstore downtown called Ritual Hand Poses of the Buddist Priests,that I used as models for casting spells. If I was doing the book regularly, I'd have a different hand position for every spell Dr.Strange casts. I'd have a certain way to position the hands to cast the Rings of the Cyttorak and all that kind of stuff. A definate pattern would be worked out.

CPL: Could you hack a monthly or bi-monthly schedule and still maintain the quality of your sample pages?

CRAIG: On a bi-monthly schedule,I'm sure I could!

CPL: Could you get into westerns?

CRAIG: That's a good question. I've tried to draw guns before but it didn't come off too well.

CPL: A lot of times, good art is wasted on western books. There are exceptions like El Diablo and Jonah Hex.

CRAIG: Have you seen the European westerns?

Lt. Blueberry is a french strip & is probably about the best drawn comic strip in the world. And it's gorgeous! You wouldn't believe all the things that could be done with a western. It's like what Frazetta did for love stories. I did get myself in a certain frame of mind for that Dr. Strange story. I didn't care too much for the Robert E. Howard adaptation or the whole Shuma-Gorath series. My story was in that run. It was all set on earth which I don't think is the right place for Dr. Strange,he belongs in all those other dimensions. About the only one to ever capture the proper mood, I think, is Ditko. He's about the only one that could get Strange into a completely different world naturally. It's almost a psychological-type thing which I tried to work into Dr. Strange. There is an entire other story going on underneath the dialogue type story. Dr. Strange goes to this other dimension, and as soon as he gets there the ground starts to suck him up into it. As he's being pulled down,up comes this organic arc which forms itself into a woman who is the villianess.....she is the planet. You find out later in the story that the reason for her luring Dr. Strange to that dimension is to make him her husband, and rule over the dark domain. The planet's

*ywouring Dr. Strange is symbolic of the possessive or ywouring woman. (See cover illustration.)

CPL: Of Ant-Man, Iron Man and Dr. Strange, which would you prefer to do on a regular basis?

CRAIG: Dr. Strange,most definately.

CPL: Do you like sorcery comics?

CRAIG: If I had the chance to do any character out of the Marvel line I would want Dr. Strange first, then Conan,then Thongor or something with that super-natural heroic flavor. As far as super-heroes go, I would like to do Iron Man or Captain America.

CPL: Why Iron Man?

CRAIG: I like the metal and his alter ego. I like the idea of his being an industrialist and all that... someone wrote a letter saying," Why don't you do more with Matt Murdock's life as a lawyer?" It seems that secondary considerations in any super-hero strip would be how they function in their other life. Another factor I take in consideration is the super-industrial image, with all the factories scattered around the U.S. The story I did was set in Cincinati and with all those factories you could have Iron Man skipping all over the place.

CPL: What do you think of this Satanic-horror movement within comics?

CRAIG: The Zombie and most of the black and white magazines,I've picked up, looked at a few pages and put back down again. I did pick up the Son of Satan,but I took one look inside and dropped it like a hot potato.

CPL: But you are interested in the occult?

CRAIG: Oh yeah, that's why I'll put it down faster than a bad super-hero strip...its because I like the Werewolf, Frankenstein, and Dracula. Its like what we said earlier about getting into the right frame of mind for your character...no one seems to be cultivating a particular approach to this occult phase of comics.

CPL: Do you feel the comics industry is wrong in putting all this Satan oriented stuff on the market?

CRAIG: I don't know if I'd say it's particularly wrong or not.....dull would be a better word! (laughter)

My idea of a good horror story is the one Steranko did in Tower of Shadows#1 called "The Stroke of Midnight". It was incredable in the fact that throughout the entire story,there were no monsters or gore or anything like that, and it still came off as scary as hell!

CPL: Would you like to work on a black and white thats fantasy and sorcery based?

CRAIG: Oh yeah! You bet I would!

CPL: Following these same lines, if Marvel were to give you a free hand in creating a new title or character of some kind, what sort of creation would it be?

CRAIG: Something in the line of the epic adventure with a little bit of everything thrown in. You know,Norse gods, Valkyries,the whole line of fantasy and mythology.

CPL: Now, we know, more and more, that comics are oriented to the younger age group. If you could do one geared to the adult level, what would you do?

CRAIG: Well, I'm working on that right now. Thats why I've been studying the Symbolist painters and getting more into mythology. I see no reason why a story can't function on two levels. For example, Smith uses symbolism....his Black Hound of Vengence had it, his Red Sonja had it too...but at the same time he makes it so an eight year old could read it and get excited by it.The story I'm working on now is called "Chimera". A Chimera is a mythical creature that leads men to

all sorts of folly. The symbolist painters were painting Chimeras all the time,picturing them with serpentine-like bodies. The story concerns a berbarian who comes to a kingdom and decides he wants to rule it. In his attempt to take over, he discovers that the queen is a Chimera.

CPL: Do you think Warren would publish something like that?

CRAIG: I don't know...I certainly hope so! There is a very straight story line going through it, enough to make it commercially salable.

CPL: Getting back to a previous question, how do you get yourself in the mood for a story? How do you motivate yourself?

CRAIG: Motivation is one of the main reasons why I took a leave of absense from Marvel. My trouble was that I couldn't co-ordernate the images from my head to the paper. I just couldn't get with it...its hard to explain.

CPL: Have you ever considered writing for other artists?

CRAIG: No, I don't think I could ever get into that, although I would like to write my own stuff.

CPL: Do you feel that when an artist does the whole book that they get a better product?

CRAIG: Yes, very definitely! When Smith did Dr.Strange, it was originally to be a big ten issue series that he and Thomas were to do. At the last minute Thomas copped out and Stan Lee came in and did it. Stan, without changing a line on the Smith pages, managed to change the entire plot line of that story,which is why Smith lost interest in it. The reason that Conan was so well done was because of the fact that Smith did much of the plots and characterizations, even though Thomas was credited. The truly unique things in Conan were largely due to Smith. I was fortunate enough to be working with Adkins at the time he was inking Conan and on the back of Smith's pages were covered with notes to Roy concerning plot and dialogue.

CPL: In other words, he influenced the writers to go one step further.

CRAIG: Yes, exactly. He not only created but guided the rest of that team along.

CPL: Are you influenced by Steranko?

CRAIG: Yes, more in story telling than artistic ability.

CPL: How about Corben?

CRAIG: I only really got into Corben about a month ago, but now I'm really impressed by his work

CPL: Who do you think is the most innovative artist in comics today? Also, who do you think use to be?

CRAIG: Today would be Smith. Nobody comes close to him in my opinion. Yesterday's artist would have to be either Eisner or Kirby, at least up to 1969. (for Kirby)

CPL: Let's get some opinions about other artists that you work and compete with. Let's start with Mike Ploog?

CRAIG: Ploog is okay. I really haven't given his work much thought. I've heard that he's taking over Man-Thing. Thats something I think he could handle quite well. He's very good with atmosphere & all that.

CPL: What is your opinion of Steve Ditko?

CRAIG: I like his work very much. His Mr. A is totally Ayn Rand philosophy. I like the idea of an artist working with ideals but he gets way too wordy. I read and read and read and read and it's all just too much! The whole comic is geared around the idea of using these ideas.

CPL: What do you think of his Charlton super-heroes,Blue Beetle,.... Capt. Atom....the Question..... all those cherecters?

CRAIG: I love 'em! I still enjoy taking them out of my collection & reading them over and over. I especially like the Question.

CPL: Let's get some opinions of a few younger artists, like Wrightson for instance.

CRAIG: I think he's finally come into his own. Before when looked at his stuff,you thought "Well here is a Frazetta swipe and there's a Graham Engles", and you could always see his influences.It was only after his second issue of Swamp Thing that he really started to gel. It became a Berni Wrightson with a style all his own. He's a fantastic artist.

CPL: What do you think of Starlin?

CRAIG: Starlin I'm watching. When I first saw his work, I said echh! I didn't like it at all, but for some reason I kept buying his stuff and looking foward to each new Jim Starlin issue. You can usually tell enthusiasm in an artist's work and his work definitely shows it. You can tell he's going to get good.His last few Captain Marvel issues were

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just fantastic. He is very good now and in a few years, he'll be one of the best.

CPL: What about Jim Aparo?

CRAIG: Aparo is most confusing. I look at his work and say, "It's sooo nice...", but I can never remember anything he has done. His stuff doesn't leave an impression on the readers.

CPL: Perhaps he's too consistent?

CRAIG: That's probably it.His cover illustrations are very striking!

CPL: Do you like undergrounds?

CRAIG: Yes. It's strange that the underground field is about the only place where the artist can get a fair shake. He is allowed to work at creativity, he gets a percentage of the profits and has more control over his work. Truly amazing!

CPL: What do you think of Howard the duck?

CRAIG: Oh, I thought he was simply incredable! I love that duck! I was really freaked out by Howard in Man-Thing. (laughter) Marvel got a amazing mail response to him. People wrote in like crazy saying that any duck that liked broads and 440 magnums can't be all bad.

CPL: Some artists claim that National is too sterile an enviroment for creative activity.Would you ever consider working for D.C.?

CRAIG: I think I would try Warren or Skywald first.

CPL: Then National isn't your first choice?

CRAIG: No. Basically because you have to work from a script having everything already laid out for you to do. I hear D.C. is making exceptions now with Wrightson & Chaykin. Both of them work straight from a plot outline like the Marvel artists do. That gives them more creative freedom. From what I hear, it's very hard to do anything creative at D.C. because you got so many editors giving you the run-around.

CPL: Do you remember when we were all kids,sitting around reading the Marvel Bullpen page. I use to imagine these guys at Marvel all relaxed in a lounge, drinking coffee, just being one big happy family.(laughter) What's happened to that image?

CRAIG: I would buy every single Marvel comic that would come out and I could hardly wait for the next Bullpen page to come out. I'd pick up a comic and say "What's Herb Trimpe doing this month? OH! HE GOT A NEW CAR!!" All that is gone now I guess. They've expanded so much that they've lost the personal touch.

CPL: Agreed. Do you think that they've sacrificed quality for quanity?

CRAIG: Marvel has a strange policy about artist and inkers. They tend to put poor inkers on good artists and good inkers on bad artists in order to balance out talent,so they say. In most cases that doesn't always hold true. It's a extremely poor policy.

CPL: Do you think Stan Lee will try to put the Bullpen back together again.

CRAIG: I hope he tries to get the overall quality back into Marvel's line. Marvel hasn't been Marvel-like for years.If you follow me.

CPL: Do you still collect comics?

CRAIG: Yes, of course.

CPL: What titles do you collect?

CRAIG: Mostly any title that has good art. I have about 7,500 comics at home now. I've gotten out of the habit of buying comics these past few months but I still read and collect them when I get the chance. I used to buy everything that came out, including Archie!

CPL: Do you like DC's SHAZAM?

CRAIG: I don't think so.(laughter)

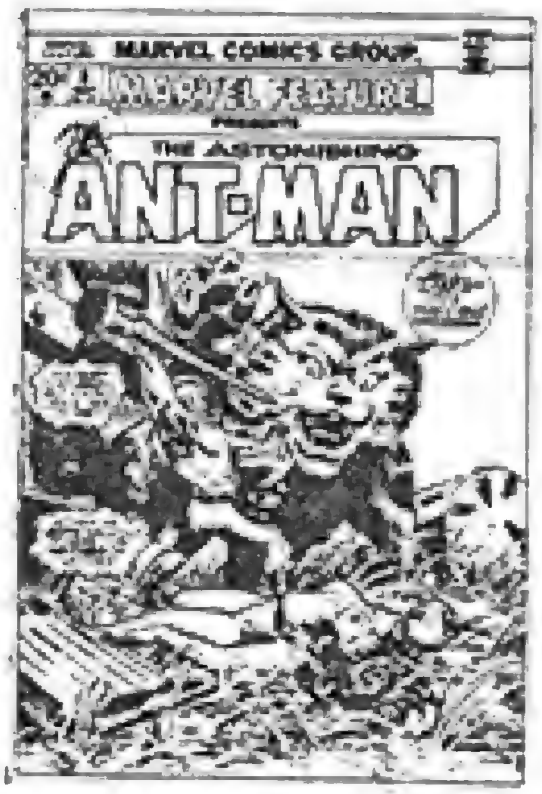
CPL: Well, thats about it for this issue, Craig. We want to thank you and wish you further success in the comics industry.

CRAIG: Thank you for allowing me to express my views.

CPL: By the way, Craig. Are you going to read this interview when it's published?

CRAIG: Yes,of course...to my lawyers anyway.

CPL: Sheesh!



¡NOX

THE HOUR OF THUNDER

BY
TONY ISABELLA

The lightning split the sky behind the lofty Terrain Building and a poet might have glimpsed die shapes through the steel clouds that filled the heavens. But Godfrey Spelling was not feeling particularly poetic this hellish night. He squeezed against the side of the bus shelter to avoid the tumultuous rain. He was cold, wet, and very tired.

The downtown area was deserted this Sunday evening. Spelling could not see another human being anywhere. He had been all alone since leaving the newspaper office. All alone in a city of over a million people. A typical Sunday night in Lakeside City. Godfrey looked at his watch. Nearly midnight. Even the muggers were home for the night.

The thunder echoed off the empty streets. Godfrey cursed the lateness of the bus, the lateness of the hour, the lateness of his presence, the latter due to a late-breaking story. And his curses were lost in the thunder, the lightning, and the rain. The hidden storm gods were angry. Spelling laughed.

Godfrey Spelling was a man who did not believe in gods. Godfrey did not believe in anything these days. He had once believed in religion until his logic interferred. He had strongly believed in his country until a president lied to him. He had once even believed in his own innate goodness until an unscrupulous rise to the editorship he did not deserve convinced him that he was as corrupt as the rest of the worthless human race.

Godfrey stopped this train of thought. It was too unpleasant without the presence of other worthless creatures to ease the pain. He decided to concentrate on other things. Why hadn't he called a cab, for one. Why wasn't the bus here, for another. He became so engrossed in these matters that he did not feel the scarlet lightning bolt that leaped from the dark skies to strike him and remove all trace of Godfrey Spelling and the bus shelter from the streets of Lakeside City.

And Godfrey thought a voice an instant later.

THERE ARE FORCES--SOME GOOD, SOME EVIL, SOME UNCARING OF SUCH IDEALS--THAT STIR ONLY AT MIDNIGHT. AND IF THESE FORCES HAVE EVER OR WILL EVER INFLUENCE THE DESTINY OF MAN, IT IS NOT FOR ANY HUMAN TO KNOW. YET KNOW THIS. THEY CAN REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE LIFE OF A MAN, A WOMAN, OR A CHILD. FOR GOOD OR FOR ILL.

And Godfrey stared out on a crisp winter morning and felt his legs weaken. He sat on the bus shelter bench. He sat there quite a long time, not knowing what else he could do. Eventually he had a better idea. He felt a stirring in his legs and went for a walk through the chilly air of his own personal nightmare.

Godfrey walked until he came to a small clearing. In the center of the clearing was a sturdy oak. Chained to the base of this sturdy oak was a giant of a man. He was massive, built as firm as the oak that held him. His long hair and beard flamed red and his eyes held the same intensity. Laying on the ground near this huge man was a short-handled hammer. On the hammer's head, a sole word was chiseled: MJOLNIR.

Godfrey stared, as was begining to become a habit in this mad dream of his. The giant's beard bristled at the newsman's seeming inability to comprehend the situation and the effect was much like that of a raging forest fire. He bellowed at Spelling with enough force to start Godfrey shaking.

"Stop gawking, you witless troll! Pick up the hammer, by Woden, and be quick about it!"

Godfrey flew to the hammer, propelled by the fear the bearded man inspired. The hammer looked as if it weighed a hundred pounds or more. He knew he could never lift it. Yet lift it he did with but a minimum effort.

"Good. You pass the first test.

Now, lift the hammer. Lift it above your head, fool, and strike down at these chains. Do not hesitate. Mjol nir can not harm it's master."

Again, Godfrey Spelling did the impossible. The hammer crashed down on the chains, shattering them with this one blow. Impact sent the hammer flying from Godfrey's hand.Mjolnir landed on the ground several yards away and still spinning from the contact.

The redbeard rose to his feet and the hammer left its resting place to come to the man's open hand with a resounding thud.With hammer in hand, a change came over the giant. Already impressive looking, he now became a symbol of strength. That massive arm was lifted to the sky and the sky was filled with crackling lightning. And thunder.Thunder louder than the disbelieving editor had ever heard before. Spelling trembled as the man turned to face him.

"Know you, mortal, that you have freed Thor Redbeard from the evil chains of Loki. As the last of the Asgardians, I deem thee a friend of the realm and a friend of Thor!"

Godfrey Spelling, crusading editor, fainted.

When Godfrey came to, he found himself flung over Thor's back and being carried with ease. Sensing his load stirring,the giant placed Spelling on his feet. Godfrey nearly fainted again,but he was steadied by Thor's burly arm and lowered gently to the ground. The newsman cursed his weak knees.

"That's a good lad. Don't be embarassed. Wielding Mjolnir's a monumental task fir any mortal, especially a beardless youth who has yet to see forty winters."

Godfrey passed that remark by. What were his thirty years to a man-god?-who had lived thousands? There were things he had to know,to understand about this very real nightmare.

"Who are you? Where is this pl-

"So many questions! You must be a scribe or, even worse, one of the poets. Relax yourself, son. I'll answer all.

"My name is Thor Redbeard, first son of the god--as humans of time past would have it--Woden. You have likely heard of me. The last time we were on your planet,we gave quite an account of ourselves. Ragnarok, your legends call it, the ultimate clash of the heroes and the traitors.

"We, the gods of Asgard, were delivered unto the evil ones in this existance by that half-breed bastard, Loki. We found like an army of madmen, of heroes, of gods! All were destroyed.

All except two. I escaped the dying lunge of the Serpant by inches. Loki feigned death and crept from the battlefield, unseen by all save myself and Hel,his daughter... mistress of death.

"I have chased Loki through a million dimensional worlds like this, seeking revenge for Asgards doom. When the Evil One caught me asleep, he chained me, inches away from Mjolnir.Though my own power was reduced,I was able to bring you here to free me. As an intelligent fellow, such as yourself has probably noticed,you did.And soon Loki will pay for his infamy!"

Godfrey listened to Thor's tale. He almost admitted that the things he had long denied existance. But, an ominous undercurrent in the god's tone grated on his newsman nerves. He couldn't put a definition on it, so he ignored it for the time being. He had one more question to ask.

"Thor, before, when I lifted Mjolnir,you said I had passed a test. What did you mean?"

"Are you but a fool, after all, man? A child knows that only the good may lift sacred Mjolnir! If it were not thus, Loki would have used it to speed my way into Valhalla! Enough talk! Our next task is to find Loki."

"Our task?"

"Of course, friend mortal. It is <u>your</u> universe which he'll destroy!"

PART II.....next issue!

BACK ISSUES OF CPL ARE STILL AVAILABLE! ORDER NOW!!

CPL #5--In this all-pulp issue fans are treated to articles on Doc Savage, Shadow, and the Avenger along with beautiful illos by Wrightson, Adams and Byrne.....40¢

CPL #6--This issues features art by Adkins, Byrne, Sinnott, Culacy, Newton, Royer, Vohland and Fujitake and all the regular crazy features. A real collector's treat.....40¢

HURRY! ONLY A LIMITED SUPPLY!

I have long been a fan of Steve Ditko's work. He has worked for almost every major publisher of super-hero books: Marvel, DC, Charlton, Tower and probably others that I can't think of at the moment. Ditko is a person who obviously has opinions and philosophies on the world and makes no bones about expressing them.

Fan either agree or disagree with Ditko's philosophies (I personally find myself agreeing with most of them), but I don't think I've ever met a fan who didn't respect Ditko's craftsmanship. I'd like to take this opportunity to discuss one of Ditko's best creations and my own personal favorite: the Question!

The Question was introduced in the Blue Beetle #1, one of Charlton's super-hero comics put out during the Batman craze. The Question was a Ditko hero in the finest tradition of Ditko heroes. One thing I've always liked about most Ditko characters is that they are people first and super-heroes second. The Question was no exception. The Question was really Vic Sage, TV broadcaster for Worldwide Broadcasting Co. Vic was opinionated and stubborn enough not to back down under any circumstances.

Considering the space limitations (the Question as a back-up was only allowed seven to eight pages) Ditko did exceptionally well. He used an average of eight or nine panels a page in order to get as much of a story into the strip as possible. The pace was always fast, mainly because Ditko had a lot of story to tell: but not much space to do it in, making the many panels per page necessary.

Like the Creeper, the Hawk and Dove and many of his other characters; the Question wasn't slowed down by having to change his costume, which by the way, was probably one of the simplest in comics. His costume consisted of his street clothes, usually a suit and tie (although in some cases it was a turtleneck and jacket) which, because of a special treatment with chemicals, would change colors. His shirts and sweaters would turn a light blue.

To disguise his features he donned a special mask invented by Professor Rodor, a character who, although appeared in some issues, was never high-lighted. It was never explained how Vic Sage met him or why Rodor invented the mask for him.

The mask was flesh colored and solid looking on the outside. On the inside, however Vic was able to see, breath and talk. When the gas that changed the color of his clothing was released it also cemented the mask to his face & turned his specially treated hair from it's normal red to black. This unique set-up allowed Vic to turn into the Question on the run eliminating an unnecessary loss of time.

This coupled with the fact that the gas also changed any I.D. on papers in his wallet to a ficticious out of state name; made it impossible for anyone to find out who he really was. Almost all of Ditko's characters have these impossible to remove costumes. Presumedly from this, we can assert Ditko did this in order to devote more time to plots and characters; and so he wouldn't be bogged down by secret identity hunters.

Ditko is a master of character. In the first issue of 88 after connecting a runner of an illegal gambling ring with a "respectable" businessman; Vic asks the viewers "..... will another (gambling ring) rise in it's place? Only you can answer that question!"

While this is being broadcasted over TV one viewer is shown asleep,

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LIBRARY
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PENCILED BY...
NEWTON
INKED BY...
ADKINS

another is reading over a newspaper thinking, "Hmm. Didn't finish the crossword." The final scene is the outside of a metropolitan building with a balloon from an occupant saying, "Hey, Mac, place a bet for me!" A perfect portrayal of public apathy!

Vic Sage's,the Question's world, was a world of politics; and the magic of the character can probably best be explained by reviewing MYSTERIOUS SUSPENSE #1, a one-shot book featuring the only booklength Question story. The fact that most of the pages were the same eight or nine panel pages that were used when the Question appeared in the back of Blue Beetle, hinted at the fact that it might be a classic among comics. It was.

The story started out with the Question, precariously perched on a building ledge several floors above ground level. Inside was a respectable businessman, Jason Ord,consorting with a known underworld character who hadn't yet been brought to justice because of lack of evidence. The Question vowed to himself to expose Ord for what he was.

After returning to his radio station Vic was confronted by one of his sponsers who was convinced by some of Vic's rivals in the station that Vic's controversial stands were why his product had slipped recently. He informed Vic that he wasn't going to renew his contract with him.

Shortly after this well-handled sequence Vic was called into the office of the president and General manager of WW.S. Co. to meet his new sponsor. Who was the new sponsor you ask? You guessed it...Jason Ord!

Vic, being a man of principals, refused to accept Ord as a sponsor; telling the manager that an unnamable source had told him that Jason Ord was connected with Wax Kroe, known racketeer. He didn't want his hands tied by having Ord as his sponsor while he set about proving his charges.

This started the ball rolling. Ord, seeking revenge for his being shunned, starts a smear campaign against Vic. The public, people at the station, even previous friends of Vic started turning against him.

It's interesting to note that Vic, not the Question was the object of all these attacks. Ditko knows how to portray characters so that their costumed self becomes extensions of the character. The Question acted as strongly (if not stronger) in his civilian identity as in his costumed one.

The pressures get stronger and stronger against Vic Sage. A time limit was imposed on Vic by the manager who, although sympathetic to his case, couldn't renew Vic's contract with W.W.S.Co. unless he proved his charges. As if things weren't bad enough, one of Vic's news staff was framed for a murder, and then the real murderer was silenced before Vic could get to him.

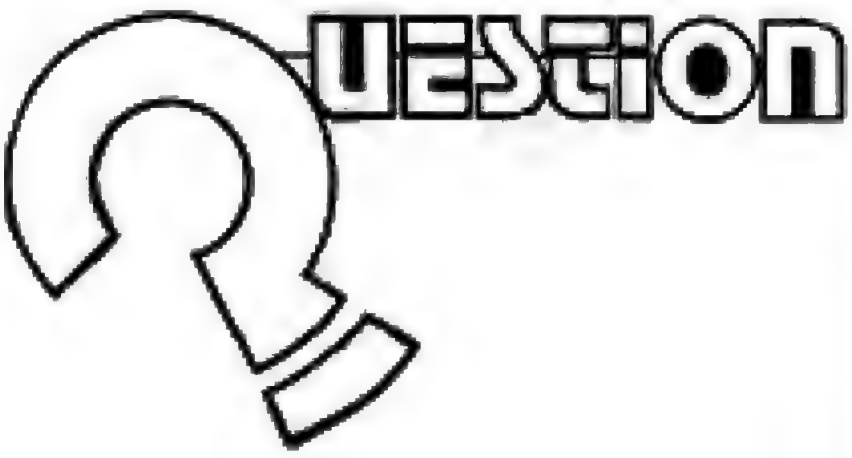
The book was wrapped up by a fight sequence in which Vic switched back and forth between his real identity and the Question and takes on a whole warehouse full of underworld characters, linking Ord with Kroe in the process.

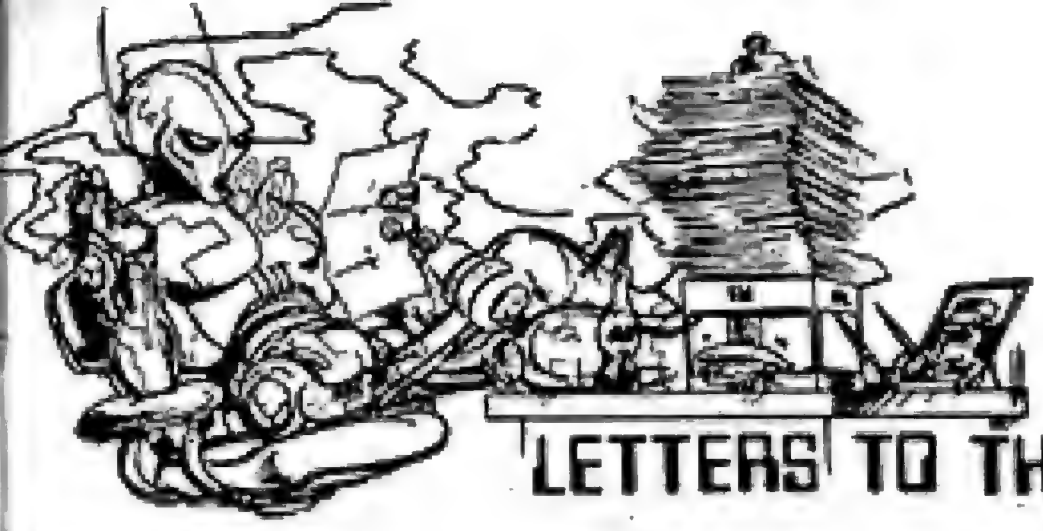
This story is all told in Ditko's unimitable style and is one of my all time favorites. I haven't expounded on the other characters in the strip,but I hope I've enhanced your desire in the Question enough to try and get some back issues of the Blue Beetle and Mysterious Suspense. And I hope if you're already familiar with the Question that I've brought back some fond memories.

It's unlikely that Charlton will revive the Question. Although he is a very strong character; the Question was probably too harsh for average readers. He felt that criminals deserved any bad situations that they brought upon themselves. The best example of this was in issue #4 of the Blue Beetle in which, after a life and death struggle with some hoods,the hoods fell into the sewer. They beg the Question to rescue them.His reply? "You're both crazy if you think I'd risk my neck to save the likes of you! As far as I'm concerned you're just so much sewage! And you deserve to be right where you are!"

This reaction of a super-hero is one of the most realistic I've ever seen, but it probably was too much to take for the average reader who was used to seeing the hero bend over backward to help the criminals no matter what they might have done to them. It was nice to see the Question given a chance though.

Oh, and before I forget,if you're not picking up Charlton comics now--do so!! There are some worth reading such as Nick Cuti and Joe Staton's E-Man; and Midnight Tales (possibly the best "weird" comic on the market). Who knows,their present comics might be the classics of the future?





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Bob,
Your new CPL (#6) is excellent and I especially enjoyed the bit about Alan Light/Buyer's Guide.
Best,
Don Newton
Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Bob,
I've heard I'm supposed to have sent Duffy Vohland a subscription to Playboy. 'Taint so, but I was billed for it...someone sent it in under my name and address.
Best Wishes,
Alan Light
E. Moline, Ill.

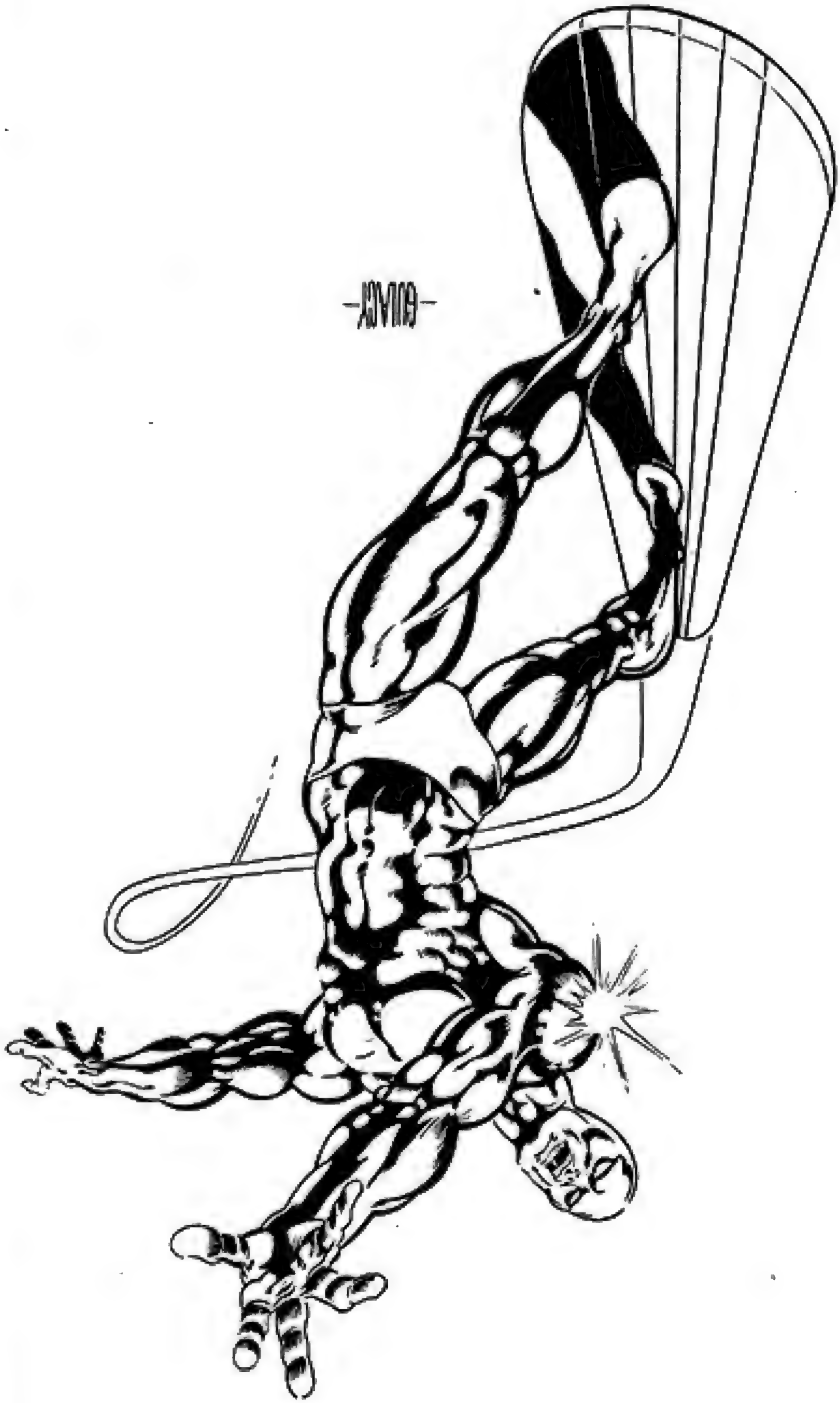
Dear Bob,
I liked REVIVAL-SURVIVAL the best.
Goodly Bump,
Roger Slifer
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Dear Bob & Rog-2000,
I think CPL is taking over where SHAZAM! The wonderful World of Comix left off! I only have the last couple of issues of WWoC but I think it was one of the better art article zines. It was too bad that Pozner quit publishing it, no matter, CPL is just as good and with a few more pages, it will be better.
Comix Forever,
Doc Lehman
Orrville, Ohio

Dear Bob,
Concerning CPL #6, I enjoyed the entire issue. Not only was the art work well rendered, but the text was very well done. I particularly enjoyed the R-S by Slifer, I didn't know TBG was doing so well and we didn't even take into account "Golden Funnies" or Flashback, WOW!!
The Gulacy centerfold, shades of "Kung Fu", it looked like it would jump off the page and ruin me for life!
Mike Royer's illo could tempt me to cheat on my wife, beautiful. The whole issue was superb. Keep up the good work.
Regards,
George Broe
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Robby B. and Gang,
CPL#6 was a winner, through and through. Allow me to pick it apart piece by piece, in my own opinionated manner. I'd first like to comment on the cover. Dan Adkins is one of the best in fandom and with the inks of Mr. Sinnott, the job had a nice finished look. Also, the 35¢ price makes CPL the best buy in fandom.
The inside cover is a good anatomical figure but the shading seemed a little unrealistic. The fact that E-Man looks to be the hottest character going explains why he is quickly losing his originality. Try again, John and Duffy.
John Byrne is not my cup of tea and when D. Vohland inks his work, it loses anything it had to start with.
I could possibly be my life-long hatred of Marvel, but Duffy's Tavern didn't do a thing for me. If Duffy broke off all affiliations with Marvel, I might have a new frame of reference. (Take note that National will only let him do backgrounds, Ha, Ha, Ha!!)
Concerning the "Save Howard the Duck", this type character is totally unsuited for dramatic comics. But since he is a Marvel character, who cares?
Rog-2000 was a stroke of genius and he makes reading more fun. Overall, CPL#6 was very good but there is room for improvement. Try to be a little more D.C. oriented and have your artists do more established heroes.
Sincerely,
Warren Prindle
Sharon, Ct.

Dear Bob,
The worst thing about CPL is that there isn't enough of it. Twenty minutes of non-stop reading and your through with it. But those twenty minutes are worth a 35¢ investment if anything is!
Tell you what- for the new year, will you give me at least a half-hour's worth of reading pleasure?
Tenstaafl,
Adrienne D'Auxell
Canal Fulton,Ohio


-GULACY-

The other day I was startled out of a particularly good daydream by the ever-insistent ringing of Ma Bell's little money-maker. For once, however, I was glad to take the call...for it turned out to be a telephonic greeting from my old college roomie, Franklin W. Maynerd...F.W. to his friends.Frank was passing thru town during the holiday and quicker than you can say "Draw two" we were sequestered in the far booth at Ferree's Bar & Grill reliving old thrills & twisting old memories. The talk eventually swung around to comics...Frank remains a bit of a dabbler...and that's when the memories really took off!

"Say, Sterno, ya see the new Penthouse?"

I admitted that I hadn't.

"There's nearly a full page on Uslan and the course! Written by O'Neil, no less!"

It is probably worth mentioning that for about the thousandth time I was slightly taken aback. For the course,what F.W. was talking of,was and still is,known by the handle of J213...The Comic Book in Society. A course that, oddly enough...I had a hand in starting some two years ago at Indiana University. It's an interesting story. One I call.....

"HOW I FOUNDED AN INTERNATIONALLY RENOUNED COMIC BOOK COURSE AND BECAME A DWINDLING NON-ENTITY!!"

It all began back in the spring of 1971. At the time,I was residing in that leaky, limestone-covered complex known as Foster Quadrangle.. even though it is composed of six buildings. I was vainly checking my mail box for the 27th time when my eyes glanced upon an unusually gaudy poster pushing something called"Foster Project Seminars". It was the usual glut of experimental student-inspired courses...stuff like "The Importance of Human Sexuality", "The Historical Impact of Woodstock", and "Yoga for Science Majors"...you know the usual stuff! Well, along towards the bottom was a small paragraph that read something like...."Don't see anything you like? Why not start your own course...for credit? See the project office for details!" And so it struck me...WHY NOT COMICS!!!?

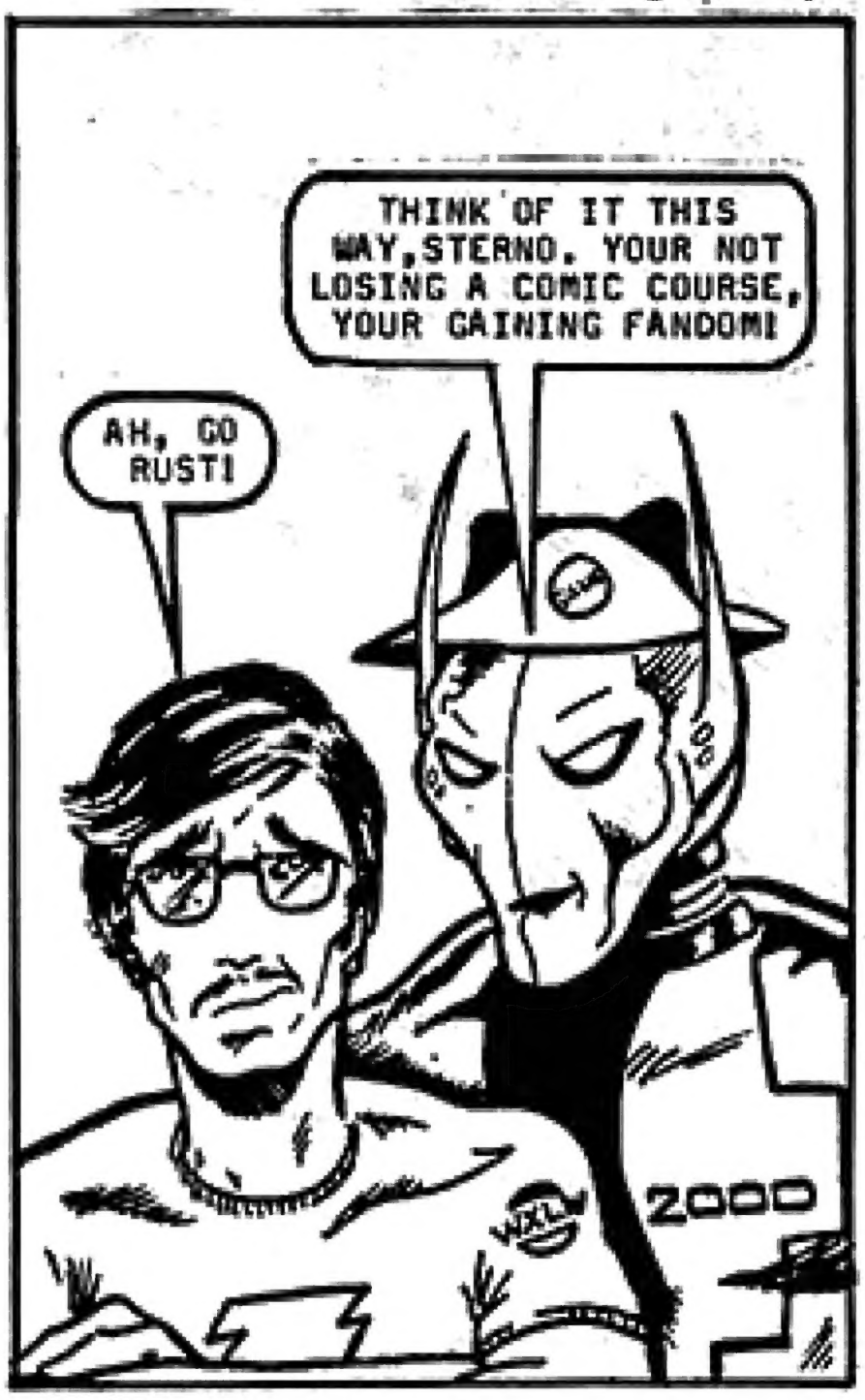
"Why not?" replied the gangling grad student behind the desk. "One topic is as good as another."

"Okey, so what do I have to do?"

"Well...," he dug into the depths of one of the most massive filing cabinets I had ever seen..."Ya fill out one of these forms and give it to me to submit to the approval committee. With it you should include a bibliography, a reading list, a class syllabus, and a statement of proposed goals."

All that evening I labored away . Alot of obvious choices went into the work....Steranko's History....an assortment of fanzines...a smattering of learned...and not so learned articles. Finally it was all completed and handed in. And then.....

nothing. Until, about a month later I received a call for a third assistant secretary in charge of whatzis that I was requested to appear befor the All-High approval committee. Well, to make a long story



short, I appeared before the committee,held them spellbound for 45 minutes to an hour with my knowledge of comic book trivialities...(Do you know anything about Pogo? Wow, and how much is that one worth? Gee, 'choke', I remember that one!)...was politely thanked and dismissed. Again I heard nothing...until July. July, 1971. I had just returned to school from the annual New York Con. Suddenly, there, alone,waiting for me was a letter: "We are happy to inform you that your course has been approved.." Great! Now they tell me.

And so, when September rolled around, it was Professor Sterno who greeted fifteen eager faces. And admittedly it was a fun semester. I got some fantastic term papers... sparked a little attention in comics around the campus. But teaching.... sheesh, what a hassle! The course was showing promise, but I needed someone else to teach it. Enter Mike Uslan. I had met Mike at WIUS, the campus-carried radio station. He was doing an oldies show called Bloomington Bandstand, and was teaching a free university course that paralleled mine. So when I approached Mike with the idea of taking over the course, he was enthusiastic.
"Say, maybe I can talk Carmine or Stan into coming to town as guest-speakers!" he expounded.
"Sure, Mike, sure!" I thought he was pulling my leg.

So Mike took over the course for the second semester.Over the Christmas holidays,he revamped it, brought in a bunch of new material, even hit up the university for a budget! And I enrolled in the class. (Sneak that I am, I knew I could get two extra credits by taking the course.) Unfortunately, I missed the first two classes because I stupidly came down with a bad case of the flu. There I was sitting at home recuperating, when the phone rang. Phones are always ringing at dramatic times in my life. This time it was a fellow comic freak,Bob Butts,making use of a temporarily unguarded watts line.
"Sterno,ya gonna be back next week?"
"Yeah, Bob! Doctor says I can come back down, why?"
""Cause Uslan's got Denny O'Neil to appear as guest speaker!"
And so it was that I returned to find Mike Uslan surrounded by a camera crew from NBC news!
"Well, Stern," Says F.W. Maynerd... "Howcum your not an international attraction, tell me?"

And tell I will in the final episode of this tale called, "TAKE THE DIPLOMA AND RUN!", in the next Sterno's Hot Ones.

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